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SUBJECT: TURKEY SUSPENDS MILITARY RELATIONS WITH FRANCE
OVER ARMENIA ISSUE

Classified By: DCM Nancy McEldowney for reasons 1.4 (b and d)

11. (C) Summary: Turkish Land Forces Commander General Ilker Basbug told journalists November 15 that Turkey has frozen military relations with France because of the French National Assembly's October 12 vote on the Armenian genocide issue. The announcement caused surprise at the French Embassy in Ankara, which is concerned about the impact on the joint ISAF Central Region Command in Kabul. A senior MFA official claimed the military suspension had been coordinated within the government and would not affect NATO operations. The announcement is an example of military assertiveness under CHOD Buyukanit and, according to French contacts here, is likely to solidify opposition in France to Turkey's EU bid. End Summary.

12. (U) In November 16 press accounts, Basbug was quoted as saying "Relations with France in the military field have been suspended" after the French National Assembly approved a legislative bill making it a crime in France to deny the "so-called Armenian genocide." Answering reporters' questions, Gen. Basbug also reportedly stated that high-level military visits between France and Turkey have ceased.

13. (C) French Embassy Counselor Brice Roquefeuil told us his embassy was taken by surprise by Basbug's statement and is very concerned about the effect on what the French consider to be a high level of military cooperation with their NATO ally. Up to now, Roquefeuil said, the damage to bilateral relations caused by the French assembly's vote on the Armenia bill had been managed reasonably well by PM Erdogan's office and the MFA. He speculated that Basbug's statement was not fully coordinated within the GOT and added that Turkey had already refused French participation in joint exercises and had denied port visit requests. A potentially more troubling impact of the freeze, he feared, might be felt in French-Turkish military cooperation in Afghanistan, where French, Italian, and Turkish forces rotate command of ISAF's Kabul Central Region command.

14. (C) Roquefeuil recalled that France faced a similar suspension imposed by Turkey in 2001, when France officially recognized an Armenian genocide; it took two years for the countries to return to their previous level of military cooperation. He warned that Basbug's statement would not help Turkey in its bid for EU membership. The French government, he said, was under political pressure not to support Turkey's membership and such action by the TGS would certainly be used by Turkey's opponents.

15. (C) MFA Deputy Undersecretary Refat Akgunay claimed to Charge November 17 that Basbug's statements had been

coordinated in advance with the MFA. (Comment: Mid-level MFA officials with whom we spoke, including Akgunay's Deputy Director General for NATO affairs, professed no prior knowledge of Basbug's remarks. End Comment) Akgunay added that the suspension of mil-mil ties with France was purely bilateral and would not affect cooperation in NATO activities. "The French have a price to pay," he stated.

¶6. (C) A former Turkish military officer with access to senior TGS officers told us that the French assembly vote on Armenia had affected Turkish decisions about the level of Turkish troop commitments and speed of deployment to Lebanon under UNIFIL. He stated that military equipment purchases could also be affected; defense tenders with French participation (e.g. South Africa's Denel helicopter, with 40-60% French content, was one of two finalists in the attack helicopter tender) were at risk. A contact at the Undersecretariat for Defense Industries (SSM) confirmed that procurement decisions might be affected, although it is not clear if existing tenders would be included. We understand that non-military commercial sales to Turkey, including a new communications satellite for Turksat valued at \$200 million, are so far unaffected by the military freeze. A French military attache confirmed to us that France had been "dis-invited" from participating in Turkey's biannual International Defense Industry Fair, to be held in Ankara in May 2007.

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